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Arrest and trial of trade union leaders and journalists

Dear Mr. President,

We write on behalf of the TUC, Amnesty International (UK) and the National Union of Journalists (UK & Ireland) to strongly protest at the arrests and subsequent trial taking place today of union leaders and journalists by your authorities.

According to the Gambia Press Union we understand that the National Intelligence Agency (NIA) arrested seven journalists – Sarata Jabbi-Dibba, Vice-President of the GPU, Emil Touray, General Secretary of the GPU and Pa Modou Faal, Treasurer of the GPU, the Editor and Deputy Editor of the Point newspaper, Pap Saine and Ebrima Sawaneh respectively, and the Editor-in-Chief of Foroyaa newspaper Sam Sarr and a reporter from the same newspaper, Abubacarr Saidykhan – on June 15th.

The seven journalists were held incommunicado until June 18th when they were charged before the Kanifing Magistrate Court with three counts of seditious publication, without the authorities notifying their lawyers.

We add our voices to the scores of trade union organisations, human rights and media advocacy groups worldwide in their condemnation of such an act of intimidation designed to stifle freedom of expression and trade union rights in the Gambia.

We join the Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Expression and Access to Information in Africa, in expressing our concern at the increasing deterioration of the situation of freedom of expression in your country. In her public statement on June 22nd following these arrests, she charged your government for failing in its obligations to protect the right to Freedom of Expression as provided in Article 9 of the *African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights* (the African Charter) and the *Declaration of Principles on Freedom of Expression in Africa* (the Declaration) which supplements the provisions of the African Charter as well as other international human rights instruments ratified by your government.

As the trial of the seven journalists opens today, we urge you to intervene to ensure that the charges are dropped and the case dismissed.

Further, we strongly call on your government to bring your media laws in conformity with Freedom of Expression standards in general and *the Declaration* in particular, by repealing laws relating to criminal defamation and amending any existing defamation laws in conformity with Principle XII of the Declaration.

Yours sincerely,



Brendan Barber
General Secretary, TUC



Kate Allen
Director, Amnesty International (UK)



Jeremy Dear
General Secretary, NUJ